

Testimony by Katherine Nicoletti

Education Committee Public Hearing

February 22, 2012

Regarding SB No. 24 – An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Katherine Nicoletti. As a member of the National Alliance on Mental Illness – CT (NAMI-CT) and the Children's Committee of the Keep the Promise Coalition, also known as KTP Kids, I am very concerned that as you address education reform you always keep in mind the needs of the "whole child." A child must be ready to learn – physically and emotionally—before any substantive and successful learning can take place. Unfortunately, significant numbers of Connecticut's school children have diagnosable emotional-behavioral problems and are not receiving appropriate mental health care. These problems present significant barriers to learning which all too often lead to academic failure, absenteeism and high drop-out rates. Teachers and school staff need training to recognize and effectively respond to the emotional and behavioral needs of children. More social workers and school psychologists are needed to provide appropriate support to struggling students. School Based Health Centers, a very successful model for providing mental health services, need to be maintained and their numbers increased.

As to a specific proposal contained in SB 24, I strongly support the inclusion in Sections 4 and 5 of provisions concerning support and wraparound services for students. In those sections one of the categories that may be in a plan for conditional funding districts and other districts to get grants are **"(vii) provisions for cooperation and coordination with other governmental and community programs to ensure that students receive adequate support and wraparound services, including community school models."** Over the past few months, it has come to my attention that while many schools are working to provide students with needed mental health services, there are community resources that have the same objectives but are not linked with the schools. This does not have to be. A School Based Mental Health Summit last month in Hamden and recorded by CT-N featured a number of exciting and successful models for bringing about greater collaboration between schools and communities, which lead to efficiencies and improved effectiveness. To see this issue included in this year's education reform agenda is extremely heartening and, if enacted, will hopefully result in more school districts collaborating with governmental and community programs to provide services to address the needs of the whole child.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Respectfully,

Katherine Nicoletti